

# 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Kenya

## KENYA (Tier 2)

The Government of Kenya does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Kenya remained on Tier 2. These efforts included investigating, prosecuting, and convicting more traffickers. The government identified more potential trafficking victims and partnered with various NGOs to offer assistance to more victims. The government partially opened its first government-run shelter dedicated to trafficking victims, including renovating a building and hiring and training staff. The government regularly sought input from survivors, particularly those exploited in Gulf states, on its anti-trafficking activities. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Protection services for victims, particularly adults, remained limited. Despite ongoing concerns of official complicity in trafficking crimes, which hindered both law enforcement efforts and victim identification, the government did not report any law enforcement action against allegedly complicit officials. Efforts to protect Kenyan trafficking victims abroad, particularly migrant workers in Gulf countries, and hold fraudulent labor recruitment agencies accountable remained inadequate.

## PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Increase protections for Kenyan trafficking victims exploited abroad, including by requiring pre-departure training for all migrant workers, training Kenyan embassy staff to identify and assist victims, negotiating additional bilateral labor agreements with destination countries that include strong protections for victims, and assigning additional labor attachés to Kenyan embassies to monitor migrants' working conditions abroad.
- Amend the anti-trafficking law to remove sentencing provisions that allow fines in lieu of imprisonment for sex trafficking offenses.
- Significantly increase the availability of short-term shelter, long-term housing, and specialized services for all trafficking victims, including by partnering with NGOs that provide victim care.
- Utilizing the SOPs and National Referral Mechanism (NRM), systematically and proactively identify trafficking victims by screening vulnerable populations – such as refugees, asylum-seekers, individuals in commercial sex, Kenyan migrant workers returning from overseas, and all foreign national workers for trafficking indicators and refer all trafficking victims to appropriate services.
- Increase awareness of all forms of human trafficking among the public through government-run campaigns or provide financial or in-kind support for NGO-run campaigns.
- Expand training to all levels of the government, specifically to law enforcement personnel and local authorities in rural and coastal regions, on identifying, investigating, and managing trafficking cases.
- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, including complicit officials, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment agencies, including by validating training for migrant workers, enforcing regulations banning recruitment fees charged to migrant workers, holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable, and training inspectors to report potential violations to the appropriate officials.

- Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- Continue to increase victim-witness assistance for victims participating in the criminal justice process to prevent re-traumatization.
- Implement the 2022-2027 NAP to combat trafficking and disburse dedicated funds to anti-trafficking activities.
- Develop a comprehensive and centralized database on trafficking crimes to improve interagency coordination and accurately report anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts and victim identification statistics.

## PROSECUTION

The government increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

The Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2010 criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of 30 years to life imprisonment, a fine of not less than 30 million Kenyan shillings (Ksh) (\$232,830), or both. These penalties were sufficiently stringent. However, by allowing for a fine in lieu of imprisonment for sex trafficking, these penalties were not commensurate with those for other grave crimes, such as rape. Sections 14 and 15 of the Sexual Offenses Act of 2006 criminalized the facilitation of “child sex tourism” and “child prostitution” and prescribed punishment of no less than 10 years’ imprisonment and a fine of two million Ksh (\$15,520). The government, in partnership with an international organization, continued to review an amendment to the 2010 anti-trafficking act to remove the option of a fine in lieu of imprisonment; however, the amendment was not approved for the fourth consecutive reporting period.

In 2024, the government reported investigating 42 cases – 17 for sex trafficking, seven for labor trafficking, and 18 for unspecified forms of trafficking. This compared with the government investigating 22 cases in 2023. It reported 83 ongoing investigations, 18 for sex trafficking, eight for forced labor, and 57 for unspecified forms of trafficking. The government reported prosecuting 44 trafficking cases including an unknown number of suspects – 38 sex trafficking cases, three labor trafficking cases, and three cases of unspecified forms of trafficking in 2024. This compared with prosecuting 19 trafficking cases including an unknown number of suspects in 2023. It reported ongoing prosecutions of 139 cases. The government reported convicting at least 21 traffickers under the 2010 anti-trafficking law, three for sex trafficking and 18 for forced labor, compared with three traffickers in 2023. Two labor traffickers were sentenced to 30 years’ imprisonment, one sex trafficker was sentenced to 20 years and a fine, and one sex trafficker was sentenced to 10 years and a fine; the government did not provide sentencing information for the other 17 convicted traffickers. Though the government partnered with an NGO to develop a centralized law enforcement data collection system on trafficking crimes that included survivor input, the database was not yet operational at the end of the reporting period, hindering the government’s ability to collect, disaggregate, and report national human trafficking statistics.

The government did not report any prosecutions or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking crimes; however, corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. An interagency law enforcement team previously arrested four police officers allegedly complicit in a case involving 37 potential Ethiopian victims, but the government did not report updates related to this case. Observers previously reported police officers accepted bribes to warn traffickers of impending operations and investigations, particularly along the coast, and officials reported perpetrators sometimes escaped conviction by bribing magistrates and court officials or intimidating or paying witnesses to make false statements. Observers alleged criminal syndicates colluded with various law enforcement and immigration departments, including those at border checkpoints and airports, to transport trafficking victims into and within Kenya. Traffickers continued to easily obtain fraudulent identity documents used to facilitate trafficking crimes from complicit officials. Media reported some Kenyan government officials, including parliamentarians, advisors, and county-level officials,

maintained ownership interests in private employment agencies, including staffing firms that send Kenyan migrant workers to Saudi Arabia, resulting in potential conflicts of interest. Media also reported some Kenyan embassy officials in Saudi Arabia reportedly demanded sex or cash payments from women seeking government assistance to escape abusive employers and return to Kenya.

The National Police Service's Directorate of Criminal Investigations maintained two specialized units mandated to investigate trafficking crimes. The Anti-Human Trafficking and Child Protection Unit (AHTCPU) investigated child trafficking crimes, and the Transnational Organized Crimes Unit investigated transnational trafficking crimes. Observers reported that the AHTCPU had inadequate funds for investigations and operations and low staffing levels due to government budget cuts. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions maintained a specialized unit dedicated to countering trafficking in persons. The government, both independently and in partnership with NGOs and international organizations, provided regular trainings to police, prosecutors, judges, immigration officials, and labor officers on how to detect and respond to trafficking crimes in their respective capacities. The government and international organizations trained law enforcement officials on several anti-trafficking topics, such as the effective application of SOPs, trauma-informed investigations and prosecutions, international cooperation in countering trafficking, and effective investigation of cyber-enabled cases. Despite these training initiatives, some law enforcement officers continued to lack an understanding of the anti-trafficking law and potentially misclassified trafficking cases as other crimes or collected insufficient evidence for trafficking cases to proceed to prosecution. The government cooperated with the Governments of Ethiopia, India, Mozambique, Tanzania, Thailand, and Uganda on cross-border trafficking investigations.

## PROTECTION

The government increased victim protection efforts.

The government identified 195 trafficking victims. This compared with 201 victims identified in the previous reporting period. Forty-one of the identified victims were foreign nationals from Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda. The government reported identifying 154 Kenyan victims exploited abroad and funded their voluntary repatriation from Burma, India, Jordan, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. This compared with the government identifying and repatriating 36 Kenyan trafficking victims from abroad in 2024. The government continued to use its SOPs for victim identification, and the Counter Trafficking in Persons (CTiP) Secretariat partnered with law enforcement, immigration officers, and social services to screen for trafficking indicators among individuals in commercial sex and foreign migrants involved in migrant smuggling cases. Officials previously reported the lack of available interpretation services, particularly for Amharic, hindered adequate implementation of victim identification SOPs and screening tools in cases involving foreign trafficking victims. Kenyan diplomatic missions continued to utilize a screening tool, provided by the CTiP Secretariat, to identify trafficking victims abroad. The government continued to train officials on the use of its NRM that outlined guidelines for victim referral to services; however, observers reported that not all front-line officers were aware of the NRM and more training was needed.

The government did not report how many victims were referred to services but reported it partnered with various NGOs to provide services to 321 victims, including medical care, psycho-social support, legal assistance, repatriation assistance, and referrals to NGO-run shelters. This compared with referring and providing services to 171 victims in the previous reporting period. The CTiP Secretariat partially opened its new shelter dedicated to trafficking victims; the shelter could accommodate up to 20 victims and the government hired a shelter manager and four other officers who received victim identification and case management training. Renovation of the shelter remained ongoing, and once complete, it will accommodate up to 60 victims with separate facilities for boys, girls, women, and men. Individuals with disabilities had limited access to shelters due to the lack of accessible accommodations. The government reported there were six additional NGO-

run shelters available to assist trafficking victims, but did not report providing any financial or in-kind support. The Department of Children's Services continued to operate five drop-in centers – located in Garissa, Kisumu, Machakos, Nairobi, and Thika – to provide services to children, including potential trafficking victims; the government did not report the number of trafficking victims provided services at the centers. Protection services for adult victims remained minimal, and NGOs previously reported the government's overall victim assistance remained limited and inconsistent in quality. Though the government reported training staff from the Directorate of Children Services to assist child trafficking victims, it noted that more training on case management and referrals is required, especially for new officers.

The government had guidelines for the National Assistance Trust Fund for Assisting Victims of Trafficking to facilitate direct assistance to victims. During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the National Treasury allocated 20 million Ksh (\$155,220) to the National Assistance Trust Fund, the same amount as the previous two fiscal years. The government maintained its Witness-Protection Agency to offer victim-witness assistance to victims participating in investigations and prosecutions; however, the government did not report providing this assistance to trafficking victims. The government provided victims the option to speak with CTiP Secretariat staff instead of law enforcement, and some courtrooms had facilities or equipment that allowed victims to provide testimony via video, one-way glass, or written statements. The government maintained child-friendly interview rooms with equipment to stream into courtrooms if needed. Due to the lack of shelters and long-term services available and the often protracted nature of criminal courts, observers previously reported that victims frequently declined to participate in criminal proceedings. NGOs previously reported some witnesses appeared to have been intimidated, disappeared, or did not appear in court for fear of reprisal. The law allowed officials to grant foreign national victims the ability to leave the country, seek employment, move freely within the country pending trial proceedings, and remain indefinitely in Kenya if they would face hardship or retribution upon repatriation. The 2010 anti-trafficking law allowed courts to order convicted traffickers to pay restitution to victims; however, the government did not report awarding restitution. Under the Employment Act and the 2010 anti-trafficking law, trafficking victims could file civil suits against traffickers for damages; however, the government did not report any civil suits filed in 2024. The government maintained a victim compensation fund administered by the Office of the Attorney General, but there were no cases for which compensation was awarded this year.

## PREVENTION

The government maintained efforts to prevent trafficking.

The CTiP Secretariat, the operational arm of the Counter Trafficking in Persons Advisory Committee, spearheaded government efforts to combat trafficking and continued to implement its 2022-2027 NAP. The government continued to implement its National Plan of Action Against Sexual Exploitation of Children 2022-2026, which included activities to prevent online child sex trafficking. The National Coordination Mechanism on Migration, chaired by the Department of Immigration, maintained responsibility for managing national coordination on migration issues, including addressing allegations of forced labor of Kenyans abroad, and collaborated with the CTiP Secretariat on trafficking issues. The government regularly sought input from trafficking survivors, particularly of those exploited in Gulf states, on its anti-trafficking activities. In partnership with survivors and civil society organizations, the government held awareness campaigns featuring survivors of trafficking to raise awareness among vulnerable populations, particularly Kenyans seeking work abroad. However, the government did not provide awareness raising materials in other languages. The government continued to operate hotlines that could receive trafficking calls, including a 24-hour hotline to report child abuse and exploitation, including child trafficking, though it did not report identifying any suspected child trafficking cases through the hotline this year. The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection's National Employment Authority (NEA) also continued to operate a 24-hour, toll-free hotline for Kenyan workers abroad to report exploitation, including trafficking.

The NEA maintained efforts to regulate labor migration and other labor-related matters, including labor trafficking. The NEA oversaw 612 licensed recruitment agencies and continued vetting labor recruitment agencies by registering them and conducting in-person inspections. The government made sustained efforts to investigate recruitment agencies, reporting administrative actions against 20 agencies for failure to meet registration requirements or for engaging in unethical recruitment practices. The NEA maintained and updated daily an external employment management system, which functioned as a “one stop” internet portal where Kenyans could search and apply for all pre-vetted overseas employment opportunities through licensed recruitment companies. The NEA continued to require recruitment agencies to pay into a security bond intended to cover airfare for Kenyan migrant workers, including potential trafficking victims, in need of repatriation due to exploitative situations. The NEA continued to take steps to address previous reports migrant workers had difficulty accessing the security fund, including enhancing communication channels and sharing guidelines for migrant workers. The National Industrial Training Authority provided pre-departure training for migrant domestic workers and NEA prepared pre-departure handbooks for major countries of destination for Kenyan migrant workers. However, NGOs previously reported some officials allowed recruitment agencies to bypass required procedures, including by issuing pre-departure training certificates to migrant workers who did not attend the required training to meet the high demand for jobs abroad. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs employed labor attachés in Kenyan diplomatic missions in Geneva, Qatar, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia. The government had bilateral labor agreements regarding migrant workers with Austria, Germany, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the United Kingdom. The NEA maintained a reporting tool on its website for overseas workers to report exploitation, including potential trafficking crimes, and request assistance. As in previous years, the NEA utilized an e-platform for recruitment and placement of Kenyans migrating to Saudi Arabia to promote a safe migration process. The Kenyan government previously identified a space for a shelter in Saudi Arabia for vulnerable migrant workers, including potential trafficking victims, but it remained inoperable.

Despite government regulations that prohibit recruiting agencies from charging migrant workers a recruitment fee, many migrant laborers continued to report having paid a fee to secure employment in Gulf countries. Labor inspectors conducted routine inspections of worksites; however, the government did not report training labor inspectors on identifying trafficking crimes or reporting any potential trafficking crimes to law enforcement. The government provided anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel. The government conducted awareness raising programs to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

## TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Kenya, and traffickers exploit victims from Kenya abroad. Traffickers exploit women and children in sex trafficking, often facilitated by family members in informal settings, and increasingly use online recruitment, including in extraterritorial sexual exploitation and abuse in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu. Authorities report cross-border trafficking rings exploit porous borders to ferry women and underage girls from the Karamoja region of Uganda to Nairobi, where traffickers exploit these individuals in domestic servitude or sex trafficking. An NGO research study on child sex trafficking in coastal areas previously reported 30 percent of the victims reported engaging in commercial sex acts with government officials, police officers, or local authorities. In a 2023 research study, one NGO estimates traffickers – including family members, peers, taxi drivers, and intermediary recruiters – exploited more than 2,000 children in child sex trafficking in Kilifi and Kwale counties.

Government officials and NGOs report traffickers increasingly exploit children in sex trafficking in private villas and vacation homes to avoid law enforcement detection in hotels. Workers in *khat* cultivation areas and near gold mines in western Kenya, truck drivers along major highways, and fishermen on Lake Victoria also exploit children in sex trafficking. Traffickers exploit Kenyan children in labor trafficking in domestic service, agriculture, fishing, cattle herding, street vending,

and forced begging. Droughts for four previous consecutive years increased trafficking risks due to livelihood loss, leading to higher numbers of illegal migration, child marriages for monetary gain, and child labor. Reports indicate criminals and gang members exploit some children in forced criminal activity, including as drug couriers. Observers report returning Kenyan migrant workers, people who are homeless, and people with mental health conditions are vulnerable to trafficking due to lack of available assistance and limited economic opportunities.

Employment agencies, both legal and fraudulent, recruit Kenyans to work in the Middle East (particularly Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, and Oman), Central and Southeast Asia, Europe, Northern Africa, and North America, where traffickers exploit them in massage parlors, brothels, domestic servitude, or manual labor; Kenyans who voluntarily migrate in search of employment opportunities are often vulnerable to exploitative conditions. Observers report foreign employers often hold migrant workers' salaries until the completion of their contract period to coerce them to stay longer, and in some cases, employers sell or "trade" migrant workers to another employer without a legal change in the employment contract, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. Saudi Arabia remains a primary destination for economic migrants; government estimates indicate more than 200,000 Kenyans are currently working in Saudi Arabia, of which more than half are domestic workers. The visa sponsorship system – common in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – binds domestic workers to one employer and prevents their freedom of movement.

Reports continue to document traffickers in the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, exploiting Kenyan women working in domestic servitude, often subjecting them to severe physical and emotional abuse. In one research study, an NGO estimates more than 98 percent of Kenyans returning from work in the Middle East report conditions indicative of forced labor, including non-payment of wages, physical abuse, passport confiscation, and excessive working hours. Reports noted Kenyan workers in Saudi Arabia are often misled by recruitment agencies and their brokers, receiving deceptive information about wages and signing contracts they are unable to read. They describe a system that treats female domestic workers akin to household goods sold by retailers online, with some recruitment company websites displaying photos of workers that can be "added to a cart." In 2025, media reported at least 274 Kenyan migrant workers, mostly women, died in Saudi Arabia in the past five years; at least 55 Kenyan workers died in 2024, twice as many as the previous year. Increasingly, traffickers in Southeast Asia use social media, smartphone applications, and fraudulent job postings with false promises of high-paying jobs in the technology, education, or hospitality sectors to recruit Kenyans with university degrees, ages 18 to 38, for work in Thailand; however, upon arrival in Thailand, traffickers transport victims to neighboring countries, primarily Burma, Malaysia, and Laos, force them into deplorable living and working conditions, and exploit them in labor trafficking, including in online scam operations, and sex trafficking. Ugandan and Nigerian traffickers exploit Kenyan women in sex trafficking in Thailand. Criminals involved in terrorist networks lure and recruit Kenyan adults and children to join non-state armed groups, primarily al-Shabaab in Somalia, sometimes with fraudulent promises of lucrative employment. Media and NGOs report unscrupulous actors, including Russian officials and illicit recruiters, fraudulently recruited women ages 18-22 from Africa – including Kenya – South Asia, and South America for vocational training programs and subsequently placed them in military drone production sites. Media report workers at these sites are subjected to hazardous conditions, surveillance, hour and wage violations, contract switching, and worker-paid recruitment fees, all of which are indicators of human trafficking.

Kenya hosts more than 843,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, primarily located in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Dadaab Refugee Complex. Refugees are generally required to live within the camps with restricted movement and limited access to education and livelihood opportunities, increasing their vulnerability to labor and sex trafficking; advocates report children and those who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual in refugee camps are especially vulnerable. Nairobi-based labor recruiters maintain networks in Uganda and Ethiopia that recruit Burundian, Ethiopian, Rwandan, Zambian, and Ugandan workers through fraudulent offers of employment in the Middle East and Asia. Kenya continues to serve as a transit point for migrants seeking work in South Africa, and these populations remain vulnerable to trafficking; traffickers exploit transiting Ethiopians in labor trafficking and Burundian and Rwandan women in domestic servitude. Recruiters use debt-based

coercion to force South Asian women, primarily from Nepal, India, and Pakistan, to work in *mujra* dance clubs in Nairobi and Mombasa, where traffickers force them to pay off debts by engaging in commercial sex. Traffickers exploit Somali women and girls in sex trafficking in brothels in Nairobi and Mombasa. Traffickers bring children and persons with physical disabilities from Tanzania and other neighboring countries to exploit them in forced begging; traffickers often coerce foreign victims to serve as facilitators to further such trafficking schemes. In October 2023, Kenyan authorities announced they would not renew the contract with the Cuban regime to hire Cuban regime-affiliated medical professionals. The Cuban regime may have been forced medical professionals who worked in Kenya to work. Chinese nationals employed in Kenya at worksites affiliated with China's Belt and Road Initiative were vulnerable to forced labor, particularly in construction.